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INDIA'S REVOLUTION

*Its Challenge
and Meaning*

by *Lillian Symes*

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Estimates quoted in this pamphlet of British investment in India are as of March, 1941. (New Delhi Legislature.)

Figures relating to wages, income, etc. are for period prior to 1941. The necessities of war production, which have led to a temporary reversal of Britain's historic policy toward Indian industrial expansion and to an attempt to make India an "eastern arsenal of democracy", have created certain inflationary conditions in India, as elsewhere, which cannot be used as a basis for computing normal standards.

February 1943.

INDIA'S REVOLUTION

Its Challenge and Meaning

by LILLIAN SYMES

All wars have been fought in the name of idealistic slogans, usually with purposes and policies wholly inconsistent with those slogans. The present World War is no exception, nor need we await the Peace Treaty to see its inconsistencies glaringly revealed. The event which has thrown a blazing search-light upon the contradiction between democratic words and imperialist deeds in the very midst of a "revolutionary war," a "peoples' crusade," is the revolt of the Indian masses, their demand for "Freedom Now!" For here is Revolution, a People on the March! But while we direct propaganda leaflets and radio broadcasts at the oppressed peoples of German-occupied Europe, exhorting them to revolt against the Nazi conquerors, we remain *officially* indifferent, if not antagonistic to the efforts of one-fifth the human race to resist oppression and achieve a better way of life.

The mass of the American people today is unquestionably sympathetic to India's cause. The task of those who would promote the concept that this is a people's war while at the same time opposing freedom for India now has become the sole one of muddying the waters with both exaggerated and imaginary "complications." It is the purpose of this pamphlet to help clear those waters for those who are genuinely concerned with human freedom, who know that democracy is indivisible, who also want to know the facts about India and social and political forces at work there. In order to do this, it is also necessary to examine briefly the background of the Indian struggle and the primary causes of its "backwardness"—so often advanced as an excuse for continued

British control. Our concern in doing so is not to rake over "ancient wrongs" but to show that the incredible misery of India is not inherent in the *Indian* economy, the character of its people, the "irreconcilable conflicts" of its racial and religious elements, but is largely the product of British exploitation and will continue so long as that exploitation continues.

Nor are we concerned with idealizing any group or leader in the nationalist struggle, or with attempting to prove "that Indian independence would automatically solve every Indian problem." The nationalist struggle is merely an aspect—the most immediately important aspect, perhaps — of the Indian Revolution which must be carried on by the Indian masses until complete political and economic democracy has been achieved. The progressive movement for independence has united disparate forces which will fall into different social and political alignments once that movement has accomplished its purpose. Some of the leadership which plays a progressive role in India today will play a reactionary role in the free India of tomorrow. But this is India's problem which the Indian masses, cooperating with those of other nations, must work out themselves.

The Indian Revolution, coming this late on the calendar of history and in the midst of a world-wide upheaval, has world-wide significance. It is a blow, probably the fatal blow, struck at imperialism everywhere. It is a torch which is lighting the fires of freedom, of democratic aspiration and struggle throughout Asia and Africa. The fate of the colonial masses of the world, the hopes of the workers everywhere—and particularly those of the British working class—are linked to the struggle of India's 398,000,000 people.

The tragedy of India is not merely the fact that it has been ruled from without, but also that it has been ruled with such disastrous effects to the Indian people. Its hope lies not merely

in independence, but also in what can be done with that independence, both for India and for the world.

CONQUEST AND RUIN

"We did not conquer India for the benefit of the Indians . . . We conquered India by the sword and by the sword we will hold it. We hold it as the finest outlet for British goods in general and for Lancashire goods in particular."

—Lord Brentford, 1928.

There is a common assumption based upon common ignorance that in its conquest of India, Britain brought civilization and unity to a heterogeneous collection of primitive, quarrelling tribes sunk in dirt, lethargy and ignorance. As a matter of fact the Europeans found in India a civilized people with nearly 3,000 years of recorded history, a democratic tradition, enormous natural wealth, a land which had been unified under the Moguls 200 years before the British arrived. The economy of this pre-British India, while backward compared with that of Europe, was a stable and self-sufficient economy based on a traditional combination of agriculture and handicraft industry, with peasant communities holding their land in common and relying on local craftsmen for manufactured articles. Its textile handicrafts were sufficiently developed however, for Indian silks and cottons, bought up by European and Asiatic traders, to play an important role—along with its spices—in world trade.

India had been robbed, both through force and trickery, by French, Dutch, Portuguese and British trading companies since 1600, but in 1761 the British under Clive vanquished their last competitors, the French, in the battle of Plassey. From that time on the British East India Company, which had been granted an exclusive trading monopoly by Queen Elizabeth, became the government as well as the ruthless

exploiter of the Indian people. The profits of the English shareholders of the company rose to 250% a year, its stock to 32,000 pounds a share. In the year that Warren Hastings boasted that he had extorted a record plunder for those stockholders, 10,000,000 people died of starvation in the province of Bengal alone.

With the coming of the Industrial Revolution in Britain, this mercantile phase of British operation in India gave way to a second which terminated the monopoly of the East India Company and which was dominated by the new industrialists who were gaining ascendancy in Parliament. (In "buying back" its control of India, Britain added the huge purchase price paid to the East India Company to the Indian debt to Britain.)

Much of the capital with which the new industrialists were financing inventions, power production and the factory system had been extracted from the Indian trade. With the saturation of the home market by power production, they sought new markets abroad and the Indian market was the most fertile field for exploitation. This meant driving Indian textiles from the European market by embargo, tariffs and Navigation Acts and the strangulation of native Indian industry. By 1850 cotton-producing India was importing more than a quarter of all of Britain's cotton goods exports. "British steam and science," wrote Karl Marx in 1853, "uprooted over the whole surface of Hindustan, the union between agricultural and manufacturing industry." India's weavers, potters, smiths were thrown back upon the already overcrowded land, its native merchants depending upon internal trade were ruined.

But the buying power of a ruined India could not keep pace with the rate of extortion, and so British exploitation of India had necessarily to enter a third phase, the use of

British and, to some extent, native capital to develop Indian resources—raw cotton, iron, steel—sufficiently to maintain the market for British manufactured goods. To do this without too great overhead costs, it became necessary to build roads, railways, irrigation facilities—a process which was inevitably bound to give an impetus to Indian industrialization. British policy was now built upon the contradiction of making India productive enough to pay for a vast stream of British goods while at the same time checking its industrialization so as to prevent Indian competition with British industry.

The Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, which was in reality a popular insurrection of a desperate people rather than a mere mutiny among Indian troops, served to hasten this process of opening up the interior. The insurrection was savagely suppressed but the badly frightened British in India had learned that roads, railroads and telegraph were necessary to the policing of a huge territory, much of it jungle, by a comparatively small army. After the mutiny, Britain also bought the allegiance of the more powerful native princes by underwriting their feudal privileges in perpetuity.

In "Skeleton of Empire" (1937) Leonard Barnes summed up Britain's historic policy as follows:

"The British spent the 19th century in breaking up the Indian handicraft industries and thereby creating immense problems of agricultural overcrowding in India and of urban overcrowding in Britain. So far they have spent the 20th in throwing millions of Indians off the land onto which the former process had driven them and into wage service in the new urban industries. And in doing so they have repeated in India almost the whole of the blunders and atrocities that have attended the beginnings of the industrial era elsewhere. That is the history of British India in a nutshell. In comparison with the generations of blind mass agony it epitomizes, all the dashing exploits of Viceroy and Sepoy generals that commonly pass for Indian history are as tinkling cymbals."

BRITAIN'S STAKE IN INDIA— AND WHAT IT MEANS TO THE INDIANS

In a trans-Atlantic broadcast in 1935 explaining "why Britain cannot afford to give up India," Winston Churchill declared: "Two out of every 10 Englishmen depend upon India."

He might have added that 4 shillings out of every English pound come from India; that British investments in India total one billion pounds or one-fourth of all its overseas investments; that Britain came through the world economic crisis of the '30s in better financial shape than other nations in large part because 203 million pounds in *gold* (more than the total British gold reserve) went to England from India between 1931 and 1935 after the devaluation of sterling, much of it derived from taxes on the Indian peasantry; that India pays annually to British shareholders in one form or another approximately 140 million pounds; that the Indian taxpayer pays approximately one-half the cost of the entire regular British army.

In 1930 Lord Rothermere stated in the *Daily Mail*: "India is the lynch-pin of the British Empire. If we lose India, the Empire must collapse—first economically, then politically." There is no indication here that Great Britain, together with its great English-speaking dominions, could survive—as have other non-imperialist nations—on any other economic base than the ruthless exploitation of non-British peoples.

IMPERIAL SLUM

What has been the effect on the Indian people themselves of the price which India has paid for the "survival" of the British Empire and particularly of that huge section of the British upper and middle classes which draws so much of its unearned increment from Indian investments?

It is generally assumed that bad as conditions of the Indians are now, they are far better than they were before the British conquest, that they are steadily improving and much better than they would be under Indian control.

We have already shown how British exploitation wrecked the self-sufficient agricultural-handicraft economy of India (to which, of course, India cannot go back at this late date) and developed it as a market for *British* goods, a source of raw materials for *British* industry, an outlet for *British* investment—in short as a colony whose whole economy is subordinated to the profit of a highly industrialized nation. A tiny segment of the Indian people—large land-owners, certain industrialists and bankers, as well as a flock of small-time usurers, have managed to prosper within the interstices of this system or in spite of it, while the feudal princes in the native states whose power and privileges have been protected by the British have not only maintained but added to their fabulous wealth. But India as a whole, potentially one of the richest nations of the world both in resources and manpower, has been reduced to the status of an urban and rural slum with a majority of its people living in a permanent state of acute hunger, in which—in the words of John Gunther —“disease, squalor and degradation of the human being to the level of animals are rampant as men live in stinking filth.”

Nor has the Indian situation generally shown signs of “gradual improvement.” The expectation of life has fallen from 30 to 23 years since 1881. (In England the life span is 60; in the United States 63 years.) Today nearly half the population of India is below 20 years of age. The percentage of literacy today is only 8 compared with 6 % before the British began their conquest.

While 400 million dollars a year are drained from India

into the pockets of British shareholders, the vast majority of the Indian people live on from 3 to 5c a day.

THE URBAN WORKER

Let us examine the condition of the more "advanced" section of the Indian masses — the industrial workers in such comparatively prosperous centers as Bombay, the gateway to India.

The infant mortality rate for India as a whole is 200 per thousand (as against 51 per thousand in Britain). But in Bombay it reaches 400 per thousand, the highest rate in the world. There is nothing surprising in this figure in view of the following facts:

The average wage of the Bombay textile worker is $22\frac{1}{2}$ c a day for men, 17c for women, $6\frac{1}{4}$ c for children.

In the Bombay cigarette factories, according to the Whittley Commission, children of 5 work "without adequate meal intervals or weekly rest days and often for 10 or 12 hours a day for sums as low as 2 anna ($3\frac{3}{4}$ c)."

Housing conditions in Bombay were admitted by the *London Times* in 1933 to be "reminiscent of the Black Hole of historical memory." Seventy-four percent of the population live in single rooms—many of them without light or sanitation—occupied by from 5 to 20 persons.

Nor are such standards a reflection of sub-marginal, low-profit industry. In the '20s the Indian jute mills controlled by Scottish capital yielded a profit of 100 pounds to every 12 pounds paid to Indian labor. And in 1928, while the larger mills were paying dividends of 100%, they increased their working hours from 54 to 60 a week.

But even such standards among the urban workers, many of whom have been organized in trade unions since 1920, are higher than those of agricultural laborers on the British

owned tea plantations where the average wage for men is 11c a day, for women 7c, for children 4c.

THE INDIAN PEASANT

But India is overwhelmingly an agrarian country. Eighty percent of its people are peasants living in 700,000 villages which are usually little more than groups of hovels, working small pieces of land outside the village as owners or tenant farmers. These holdings average about an acre and a quarter a head for the agricultural population and at least half of what they produce must be set aside for the payment of taxes, interest on indebtedness (which may run to 75 or 100 percent) and rent. The peasant income is estimated at about 5c a day.

Between 1921 and 1931 the number of agricultural laborers increased by 10 million. They represented peasants driven off the land by the impossible burdens of government taxes, rent to absentee landlords, interest to usurers. Between 1931 and 1937 the agricultural debt increased from 675 million pounds to 1 billion 250 million pounds. There are approximately *50 million landless peasants* in India today who work when they can for what they can get—with Indian industrialization arrested at a level where it cannot absorb them. As Kate L. Mitchell writes in "India Without Fable": "The cause of Indian poverty is not the rate of population growth but the fact that India is a case of arrested economic development."

SICK INDIA

In 1928, before the world-wide economic crash and depression, the director of health from Bengal reported: "The present peasantry of Bengal are in very large proportion taking to a dietary on which even rats could not live for more than five weeks."

But malnutrition and disease, particularly tuberculosis and malaria, are as common to the urban as to the rural masses—a fact which alone would be sufficient to account for that fatalistic apathy that is supposed to be the natural characteristic of the Indian people.

In 1935-36, the amount spent on medical and health services in British India constituted 2.6% of total public expenditures; 23.9% was spent on the military services.

Malaria is one of the worst scourges of Indian life. It is both preventable and curable by quinine. Cinchona, from which quinine is made, is produced in quantity on government farms in Bengal. The quinine itself costs but six rupees a pound to produce but is sold at the rate of 18 rupees per pound, which puts it beyond the reach of the average Indian. The government makes a profit on it of 200%.

Britain, as we have remarked earlier, is not wholly and directly responsible for every evil which besets the Indian people. There have been minor factors within Indian society itself which have *contributed* both to India's backwardness and to the comparative ease with which Britain has been able to control India in the past. Among these may be counted certain stultifying aspects of the Hindu religion (which has inspired so much dime-store mysticism in the western world) and certain social concepts as caste. But Britain has both deepened and prolonged their influence by its suppressive policy toward the most progressive tendencies in India, by its exacerbation of every possible racial and religious difference and most of all by its policy of arresting as far as possible the natural economic development of the country. Industrialization, limited and controlled as it is, has been undermining the economic base of the caste system ever since the first World War by destroying the old divisions of labor and modes of life. (The vast majority of all Indians, including the poorest peas-

ants and laborers, are *caste Hindus*.) The caste system and all that goes with it could not survive the free and natural development of the Indian economy.

INDIA'S AWAKENING

The present pattern of India's revolutionary struggle for freedom — the development of a militant mass movement expressed in trade union, peasant and political organization— dates from the close of the first World War which made it necessary for Britain to encourage and develop Indian industry, especially such heavy industry as iron and steel manufacture, for the duration.

India contributed more than a million men to the British armies, more than \$500,000,000 to the British war chest. It also purchased more than \$700,000,000 in war bonds and sent more than a billion dollars worth of goods to the British forces. Among the large contributors were leaders of the Congress Party, then a party of India's small educated minority with a comparatively moderate program. Like the still smaller extremist party of revolutionary terrorists, most of whose leaders were already in exile, it lacked the *active* support of India's long-suffering masses. In return for India's loyalty and as a sop to its war-time demands, Britain pledged in 1917 "the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realization of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire."

But by the end of the war, the hopes of the Indian moderates were already being blasted. By 1919, aroused by new fears of Indian competition, British industry was renewing the old game of ham-stringing Indian industrial development. Preferential tariffs and a new rate of exchange enabled British bankers to extend their control over the Indian banking system. The post-war slump in the war industries (which had

created a much larger Indian proletariat) plunged the masses still deeper into misery. Post-war unrest was met by the infamous Rowlett Acts and the "New Constitution" of 1919. At Amritsar, where a few thousand people gathered peaceably to express their grievances, 400 were killed, 1000 wounded by British bombing planes. The stage was set for the opening of a new mass struggle in India.

A LABOR MOVEMENT IS BORN

The high prices and profits of the war period had led to the organization of local unions and to sporadic strikes. In 1920, the first All-India Trade Union Congress was held in Bombay and in the two years that followed an epidemic of strikes swept the country. In 1928, another and much greater strike wave occurred—in the Tata Iron and Steel Works, in the textile and jute mills, on the railroads, among the scavengers of Calcutta. The strike of 150,000 textile workers lasted for six months. The strikes were ruthlessly suppressed and early in 1929, the British government arrested 32 trade union leaders on a charge of conspiracy and sentenced them to long prison terms.

In spite of temporary set-backs and the disadvantage (which it shared with the western labor movements) of Communist political intrigues and zig-zags within it, the Indian labor movement has grown in strength and militancy since that period. The year 1938 witnessed 400 strikes involving 650,000 workers. Its influence within the nationalist political struggle and the Congress Party which it has supported has strengthened the Left-Wing of the Congress — notably the influence of the Congress Socialist Party and of Nehru—and offset that of the Gandhi-peasant-industrialist Right Wing.

THE CONGRESS PARTY— ITS CHARACTER AND LEADERSHIP

The political symbol of India's national awakening in the decades between two World Wars is the Congress Party which became a mass party, with a comprehensive social and economic program and a democratic international policy, in the post-war period. The character of the Party, embracing as it does wealthy industrialists and Oxford-trained professionals, illiterate peasants and mill hands, social conservatives and social revolutionaries, Hindus, Moslems and representatives of a dozen smaller groups and sects, is a reflection of the pervasive, all-embracing character of Britain's imperial exploitation of India.

The present social composition of the Congress Party dates from that period of seething unrest and upheaval which followed the first World War and which was marked by the general fraternization of Hindus and Moslems in a common cause. In this period of widespread strikes and violent demonstrations against *both* British and native exploitation, the Indian industrialists and business men were also feeling the full brunt of Britain's renewed efforts to check or smother native economic development. While nothing short of a mass movement of an aroused Indian people was capable of challenging Britain's power, they feared to support any movement which, with a vanguard of urban workers, militant students and Socialists, might so easily get out of hand and go much "too far." The entry of Gandhi into the nationalist struggle and his ascendancy to leadership in the Congress Party in 1920 solved this dilemma for them. For Gandhi brought with him not merely a philosophy and technique of "non-violent resistance" but also a personal mass following which, for all its unspeakable misery and incoherent unrest, had previously remained unmoved by the nationalist agitations—the back-

ward and highly religious peasantry which formed the base of the whole social pyramid in India. In this situation lies the key to Gandhi's political power and to most of the contradictions in the nationalist movement.

Since his return from Africa in 1914 and the establishment of his colony of disciples at Amedabad, Gandhi had devoted himself to the cause of the Indian peasants. A deeply religious Hindu and mystic, as well as an astute politician, he preached (and practiced) a doctrine of personal saintliness, asceticism and non-violence to a people whose religious and social traditions already predisposed them to such doctrine; a people, too, to whom non-cooperation seemed to offer the only immediately practical weapon of resistance and protest. To these submerged and hopeless millions, Gandhi unquestionably brought hope, self-respect, a new purpose. He had become a saint, a "Mahatma" to millions of Indians even before he became the dominant leader of the Congress Party. His insistence upon non-cooperation and other non-violent techniques as *political weapons* in the struggle for Indian independence (they were first used effectively in the disturbances of 1918-19) and the socially backward nature of his following and outlook were sufficient to reassure the hesitant industrialists and other wealthy moderates who henceforth contributed generously to the work of the Congress Party.

Though Gandhi has been constantly pictured as the "extremist" leader of Indian nationalism, his influence within that movement has been, in actuality, one of moderation, conciliation and vacillation, of holding back, rather than encouraging the momentum of the Indian revolution. It was not until 1930 that Nehru succeeded in converting him—and the Congress moderates—to the demand for India's complete independence, after it had become clear that England had no intention of granting their more moderate demands.

Again and again, since that time, Gandhi has called off mass civil disobedience campaigns at the very moment when they had achieved the widest support and momentum, were actually threatening the whole fabric of British control, but were also threatening to pass beyond his own control and objectives. He has been accused by Congress radicals of preferring defeat to the Indian cause rather than victory by any other than completely non-violent means. He has twice abandoned the leadership of the Party in periods calling for decisive mass struggles. Though he has not been a member of the Congress Party since 1934, his is still the most powerful influence within the Indian nationalist movement.

The Gandhi-peasant-industrialist alliance which constitutes the Right Wing of the nationalist movement and whose most effective functionary in the Congress Party is the peasant leader, Sardar Patel, is an alliance based upon immediate need, not ultimate perspective. The purpose and role of the Indian industrialists who support the Party is the industrialization of the Indian economy and the exploitation of Indian resources by Indian capitalists. Politically, their interests demand a free capitalist India. (The most socially reactionary classes in India are to be found in the Hindu Mahasabha and the Moslem League.) To Gandhi, on the other hand, the salvation of the Indian people, once they are freed of British rule, lies in a return to the simple and primitive way of life which preceded the British conquest. In the words of Kate L. Mitchell (*India Without Fable*) he is seeking "to lead an impoverished people, desperately in need of modern industrial and agricultural techniques, backward along the path of economic retrogression to a primitive society based on handicraft industries and the renunciation of all forms of mechanization." If the Congress industrialists have shown little concern over his long-range perspective, it is undoubtedly because they realize (as do the

left-wing forces which opposed Gandhi's ascendancy to leadership) that once India has thrown off the strangling incubus of imperial control, neither Gandhi nor anyone else can divert its need and demand for a fuller as well as freer way of life.

Though the Right Wing combination headed by Gandhi controls the Congress Party apparatus and has been largely responsible for its cautious tactics in the struggle for independence, the Left Wing forces in general—for whom the Congress Socialists have served as a spear-head—have managed to mold, to a large extent, the domestic program and international outlook of the Party. It is largely due to their influence that since 1930 Congress has ceased to think in terms of "dominion status." At the Karachi Congress in 1931, it was Nehru and the Left Wing who proposed and pushed through that historic document, the Resolution of Fundamental Rights and Duties—a combined Magna Charta and advanced social program for the nationalist movement.

The Karachi Resolution calls for the democratic socialization of the basic Indian economy, its *national* industries and resources. It proposes complete religious freedom in India; freedom of speech, press, assembly, equality before the law, regardless of caste, religion or sex; the protection of the culture and language of minority groups. Its peasant program calls for the immediate control of usury and a moratorium on all agricultural debt, for education, bread and freedom for the submerged agrarian masses. And—in spite of Gandhi's complete pacifism and its own general adherence to non-violent methods in the struggle against Britain—the Congress proposed the provision of military training for Indian citizens by an Indian government, "so as to organize a means for national defense apart *from the regular army*," thus indicating that it recognized the uses of a regular army to dictators and bureaucracies in dealing with an unarmed citizenry.

The Congress supplements its domestic program with widespread day-to-day activity in the fields of education, public health, medical relief. It sponsors cottage industries and cooperative societies, participated in by millions of non-Congress members under Congress leadership.

But aside from its official program and activity, the generally progressive and anti-fascist character of the Party can be gauged by its attitude on international developments in the past ten years. It protested Japanese aggressions in China from their very beginnings and has repeatedly sent medical supplies and units to the Chinese people. Since 1937, it has carried on a highly effective boycott of Japanese goods. It protested the Italian invasion of Ethiopia and supported the Spanish Loyalists, both morally and materially, in their struggle against Franco. It has refused, both before and since the beginning of the present war, to have anything whatever to do with Axis overtures or representatives. Only one Congress figure, Subhas Chandra Bose, a bitter critic of Gandhi's moderation who had wavered in his ideological allegiance between Stalin and Hitler, has gone over to the Axis. Bose had been imprisoned with other Congress figures in 1940 but later escaped to Berlin.

How is it possible to reconcile within one mass party the perspective of the advanced Indian workers and progressives, as embodied in the Karachi Resolution, and the ambitions of India's industrialists and business men to whom the Indian revolution stops short at the achievement of national independence? How account for the close cooperation and friendship between the two outstanding leaders of the nationalist movement—Gandhi, the medieval mystic and orthodox Hindu, the champion of private property, the opponent of any type of force, and the brilliant and modern-minded Nehru to whom national independence is merely the first

step in the Indian revolution; who believes that Socialism is the only solution to India's problems; to whom non-violent resistance is *a* political weapon, not a moral absolute or the *sole permissible weapon* of revolutionary change and self-defense?

These perspectives *cannot be reconciled* but they have been temporarily subordinated to the national struggle of the whole Indian people, no section of which can develop its potentialities or achieve its own aims so long as India remains the colonial victim of imperial plunder, its life-blood constantly drained away to enrich its imperial masters. The belief in Gandhi's "indispensability" as the spiritual symbol and focal point of Indian unity in the struggle with Britain (a belief shared by Nehru but not by all Congress left-wingers) flows both from the need of the Indian industrialists for the force of a mass movement behind their demands and from the need of the more advanced workers, and their student and professional allies, for the cooperation and allegiance of the more backward peasantry, not only to achieve independence but to build on its foundations a modern, *completely* democratic India. However, both the tempo and character of India's development will depend to a large extent upon which of these perspectives develops the most dynamism and exerts the greatest influence among the Indian masses, now and in the future. The potential militancy of the Indian peasantry, in spite of its social backwardness, is indicated by the fact that on one occasion when a mere *threat* by Gandhi was mistaken for a call for a civil disobedience campaign, the refusal of the peasants to pay their taxes was so effective that only 5 per cent of the rural tax bill was collected in that period. On other occasions they have shown themselves far more militant than their leadership. The task of the Indian workers is to establish direct relationship with the peasantry.

THE UNTOUCHABLES

A frequent charge brought against the nationalist movement, and the Congress Party in particular, is that it does not represent and has done nothing for the most wretched and submerged of all India's social classes — its 40,000,000 Untouchables. Before discussing this charge, it may be well to touch briefly on the general subject of *caste*. Orthodox Hindus (and Hinduism like Moslemism is a religious, not a racial category) are divided into a number of castes and sub-castes, ranging from the highest priest and scholar caste (the Brahmins) to the lowest which includes artisans and peasants. Intermarriage between castes is forbidden. But below these caste Hindus is a huge group of no-castes or out-casts—the Untouchables—who live in segregated communities, who are restricted to the most menial jobs, who cannot enter public buildings and temples and whose touch is sufficient to pollute an orthodox caste Hindu. In short, Untouchability is an intensified Hindu form of Jim-Crowism.

It is true that the political leader of the Untouchables, Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar (who holds a degree from Columbia University) is bitterly opposed to the Congress Party on the ground that it is dominated by caste Hindus and he is now cooperating with the British Administration. The fact that Gandhi himself is an orthodox Hindu who believes in the caste system — though not in Untouchability — has given some weight to his anti-Congress position. Gandhi's own proposed solution for the problem is to include the Untouchables, as still another caste, within that system. In 1932 he went on a thirty-day hunger strike as a public protest against Untouchability. He is a founder of the Anti-Untouchability League. The Congress Party has opposed Untouchability for more than twenty years.

However, the whole caste system, as we pointed out earlier,

is already being vitiated by the industrial process, the breakdown of village isolation and the political awakening of the whole Indian people.

THE HINDU-MOSLEM ISSUE

THE PROBLEM OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNALISM

Perhaps none of the many complications in the Indian situation has been so exploited by anti-nationalist propagandists or has served so well the British political technique of "divide and rule" as the supposedly "irreconcilable" conflict between Hindus and Moslems, the two major religious divisions among the Indian people. (The Moslems are simply Indians who happen to be Mohammedans instead of Hindus—just as there are Americans who happen to be Catholics instead of Protestants.) The Hindus constitute 68 per cent of the Indian people, the Moslems 22 per cent. The remaining ten per cent are divided among smaller religious groups.

Pro-British propaganda as well as much confused discussion of the subject would lead one to believe that the Moslem 22 per cent of the Indian population is bitterly opposed to Indian independence in general (unless it provides for a separate Moslem state) and to the Congress Party in particular. As a matter of fact, the Congress Party has a large Moslem membership and some of its outstanding leaders, including its President Abdul Kalam Azad and Syed Abdulla Brelvi, editor of the *Bombay Chronicle*, are Moslems.

But an even better indication of the real situation is contained in the results of the 1937 Provincial elections. In 1935 a new "Indian Constitution" was imposed on India by Britain which was unquestionably calculated to "freeze", if not to aggravate every possible religious difference and controversy in India. It granted suffrage to 14 per cent of the total Indian population *on the basis of its religious differences*. That is, a fixed per cent of each denomination was

given the right to vote—only, of course, for *provincial* assemblies. In proportion to its size, the Moslem community throughout India was apportioned 482 seats out of a total number of 1,585 seats in the provincial assemblies. In the 1937 elections (the last to be held) the Moslem League, which claims to represent the whole Moslem community in India, won only 106 out of these 482 seats; it failed to receive a majority in a single province, even in the four which are predominantly Moslem. Even the Northwest Frontier province, 92 per cent Moslem, elected a Congress government.

THE MOSLEM LEAGUE

What is the social and political character of the Moslem League which was so decisively repudiated in the 1937 elections but which constitutes one side—the most troublesome side—of the “communalist” controversy?

The League is primarily the instrument of wealthy and reactionary Moslem landowners, bitterly opposed to the agrarian and social reforms of the Congress program, frightened by the growing fraternization between their Moslem and Hindu tenants and laborers—whose combined power might be turned against them—and determined to protect their own interests at all costs. The leader of the League, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, is a shrewd lawyer with unlimited political ambitions who is utilizing the class fears of the Moslem landowners and the British effort to stimulate a native opposition to the nationalists to achieve political power. Jinnah has been called the “Father Coughlin of India.”

Jinnah’s proposal for “Pakhistan”—which has proved so invaluable to the British in their “negotiations” with the nationalists—is a proposal for two separate Indian states, one Moslem, the other Hindu, based upon a geographically and economically untenable and a generally imaginary division among the Indian people. Even if it could be realised, it

would create a series of little religious Sudetenlands and Polish Corridors to serve as a source of endless conflicts between people of the same nationality and economic interests and, in spite of its supposedly "democratic" character, would lead to the division and defeat of the whole democratic movement in India. It is interesting to note that even the Moslem Premier of the Punjab, Sir Sikander Hyat Khan, broke with Jinnah on the subject of partition (though Sir Stafford Cripps, the British "radical," accepted his proposal as an insurmountable obstacle to the demand for Indian independence) and that even in Bengal, stronghold of the League, the Moslem population is divided on the partition issue.

The reply of Congress to the Pakhistan proposal is that whatever conflict may exist between Indian Moslems and Hindus is based on poverty and economic status, not upon religious differences. (In some districts, Hindu landlords cheat and oppress a predominantly Moslem peasantry, in others, Moslem landlords do the same to Hindus.) They declare that the solution to any Moslem-Hindu conflict lies not in the disruption and division of India but in the removal of its economic causes.

THE HINDU MAHASABHA

The Hindu contribution to the "problem" of religious communalism is embodied in the All-India Hindu Mahasabha, the Hindu counterpart of the Moslem League which functions as the political instrument of the most reactionary and orthodox of the caste Hindus, mostly wealthy merchants and landowners. Its leader, Pandit Malaviya, founder of the Hindu University at Benares, has made every effort to convert the Congress Party to a policy of Hindu communalism—which would mean the complete Hindu domination of the Indian government within the frame-work of the British plan for Indian federation and a return to the good, old days

of Hindu social and religious orthodoxy. While Malaviya has received some encouragement from a few Right-Wing members of Congress, he has made no impression at all on the Party as a whole which remains bitterly opposed to any form of communalism. As a result, the Mahasabha consistently attacks the Congress Party for sacrificing Hindu interests in the nationalist struggle. However, its influence is confined largely to Bengal where it has done much to aggravate religious differences, to increase Jinnah's influence and to antagonize potential Moslem support to the nationalist cause.

INDIA AND THE SECOND WORLD WAR

The circumstances of the Second World War, with Japan a powerful enemy rather than an ally of Britain, have placed India in a position of economic as well as strategic importance immeasurably greater than in the first World War. And today Britain is bending every effort, not to win the free support of the Indian people to a struggle against the Axis, but to defeat their democratic aspirations while it belatedly attempts to convert the country into an industrial arsenal for its Eastern war needs. A few hours after the outbreak of war, and without consultation with a single Indian representative, Britain declared India a belligerent, suspended the provisions of the 1935 Constitution, prohibited all meetings and any form of propaganda and proceeded to rule India by decree of the Viceroy. When Congress—after emphatically condemning Axis aggression—demanded a Constituent Assembly to decide Indian policy and asked Britain “to declare in unequivocal terms what their war aims are in regard to democracy and imperialism . . . in particular how these aims are going to apply to India and be given effect in the present” the British, through Lord Linlithgow, Viceroy of India, merely referred them to its earlier promises of “ultimate self-government within the Empire.”

At this declaration of policy the Congress provincial ministries promptly resigned, Gandhi returned to leadership in the Congress and was authorized by its Working Committee to launch a campaign of mass civil disobedience. Instead, he limited the campaign to "individual" or purely token disobedience by picked members of Congress. Within a week, Nehru and several other Congress leaders had been arrested and sentenced to long prison terms. By the middle of 1941, when the campaign had spread, 37,000 members of Congress were in prison.

It was not until March, 1942, when the military situation in the Far East and South Pacific had become desperate that Prime Minister Churchill announced that Sir Stafford Cripps was being sent to India with a "new plan" which would permit the concentration of Indian energies and resources on the struggle against Japan.

The Cripps proposal turned out to be nothing more than the old "dominion status" proposal which Congress had rejected in 1930—in fact, not even that, for it proposed to leave real control where it has always been, in the hands of the Viceroy. The nationalist leaders were willing to have the Viceroy remain temporarily, as a figure-head; they were willing to leave matters of military strategy in the hands of General Wavell and his staff; but they demanded, first, immediate acknowledgment of Indian independence and second, the formation of an interim Indian Cabinet with the full powers and responsibilities of an Indian government. Furthermore, they refused to consider the Cripps proposal of the right of "non-accession" of individual states (a proposal designed to protect the status of the Indian princes and to allow for "communal" separation) which would merely lay the basis for continual disruption and even civil war. To the charge that political independence would leave India wide

open to Japanese invasion, they answered that *only* an Indian government, representative of the Indian people, could rally them to the defense of India; that Indians would defend themselves but not the British Empire which was enslaving them.

But Britain has shown itself determined to defend India *without* the Indian people—even after the disastrous experiences of Malay and Burma. The efforts of Gandhi and other Congress leaders to arrive at some “workable” compromise—even over the heads of an aroused people—both before and after Cripps’ departure for England, have met with a resolute stiffening of the British attitude. Recently the American and British press has been playing up the possible “mediatory influence” of Chakravarti Rajagopalacharia (generally referred to as “C.R.”), a former Right Wing leader in Congress, prime minister of Madras and a fanatic Brahmin. “C.R.” was the one Indian leader who was ready to agree “in principle” to Jinnah’s Pakistan proposal. He has also been a bitter critic of Gandhi’s dictum about the “non-violent” defense of India. Another British gesture, aimed at the confusion of the nationalist struggle, has been the lifting of the ban on the Indian Communist Party which was declared illegal in 1936, the idea being that—with the present Communist international line on the war—the party would dilute, if not oppose the nationalist offensive at this time. It has attempted to do the former, upholding the demand for Independence (it could not do otherwise and maintain a shred of influence) while opposing civil disobedience and other militant methods needed to achieve it.

While Gandhi’s statement of May, 1942, calling for a purely non-violent defense against Japanese aggression has aroused both caustic criticism and amusement in this country, it was the refusal of the British to accede to Nehru’s demand

for the arming of the Indian people under their own leaders in order that they might conduct guerrilla warfare in their own defense (as have the Chinese workers and peasants) that left Congress with no immediate alternative to Gandhi's proposal. By its August, 1942 meeting, however, so much opposition to the Gandhi limitation had developed within the nationalist movement—including the peasant organization, the Kisan Sabha—that all reference to it was removed.

At the same time, censored newspaper reports to the contrary, the tempo and militancy of the Indian struggle has been merely accelerated by the imprisonment of the Congress leaders and the stiffening of Britain's attitude. There have been wide-spread demonstrations and violent disturbances throughout the country and at one time a cordon of troops had to be thrown around Delhi to "handle" the situation. Fifty thousand workers in the Tata Steel Mills have gone on strike and as we go to press, a new wave of strikes and demonstrations is reported by radio. According to a reliable report from an American representative recently returned from India—a report which was never published in the daily press—thirty thousand Indians (not a reported few hundred) were killed in the disturbances of the past summer. Without Gandhi's restraining influence, the British are now confronted with a far more difficult situation than they faced previous to his imprisonment.

Many Americans who are ready to grant that India must be given its independence are nevertheless annoyed that it should insist on that independence *now*, while "world democracy" is at stake. But if world democracy is at stake anywhere, it is certainly at stake in India and among the 430 million darker-skinned subjects of the British Empire generally and it is precisely here and now that it must prove its case. If Britain will not free India's 398,000,000 actual

and potential enemies of fascism now, when their freedom may be the sole effective weapon against Japanese domination of the East, it is not likely to do so, once the pressures of the war situation are removed. If Britain's extremity is India's opportunity (as it was ours in 1776 and 1812) it is also the opportunity of the democratic peoples of the world. Whether or not the resistance of a free India would "win the war" for the United Nations, democracy cannot triumph until imperialism is dead.

THE MEANING AND FUTURE OF THE INDIAN REVOLUTION

The Indian Revolution partakes of the nature of both the American and French Revolutions. It represents an attempt of a colonial people to escape the political and economic shackles imposed upon it from without; a revolt from below against mass misery and the effort of the new, ascendant business and industrial class to throw off the feudal limitations which restrict its progress and to achieve a freer order dominated by its own economic interests.

But the Indian Revolution, coming at this late date cannot follow the pattern of 18th and 19th century development—or it can follow it only to its doom. These earlier revolutions occurred in a period when private capitalism represented a healthy, ascendant, progressive force and when political democracy was an essential element of its development. Today, on the stage of world history, the drama of private capitalism has already been played—and played out. Not only does it offer no solution to the problems of mass misery; it has produced new forms of *wholly unnecessary* mass misery on a gigantic scale and in its disintegration it is also producing new forms of political and economic tyranny. While Indian independence on any terms would mark a political advance over its present status and would certainly

accelerate its industrial development, a free India dominated by the Indian representatives of a dying economic order would share in its disintegration and all the evils to which it is giving birth.

Given its present social and economic backwardness, India cannot, of course, institute a Socialist society on the day after it achieves its independence. But unless it moves rapidly and purposefully toward that goal, under the leadership and guidance of the social group which is *today* the bearer of a new, democratic and dynamic revolutionary impetus in human society, it will be forced to move forward in another direction, toward another kind of "planned economy"—the fascist, authoritarian state. It cannot go back or stand still.

When Nehru stated that: "The only solution of India's problems lies in Socialism, involving vast revolutionary changes in the political and social structure in land and industry," he was not merely uttering a propaganda slogan or thinking in "ultimate" terms. He was defining the immediate social and economic *direction* which the Indian Revolution must take if it is to solve its social and economic as well as its political problems. The revolutionary struggle for India's independence from Britain is already providing the training and preparation for this task—in the trade unions and peasant organizations, in the numerous and far-flung self-governing cooperatives which, whatever their original purpose, can serve as the functional nuclei for the organization of a new, democratic society. The revolutionary impetus behind the nationalist movement is not merely political, in the narrow sense of that term. The mass support of workers and peasants was inspired by its internal economic program as well as by its nationalist aims. The realization of that program means the carrying forward of the Indian Revolution now and after independence is achieved.

The completion of the Indian Revolution cannot be carried through by the Congress Party as it is at present constituted, or by any similar party representing such wholly contradictory social and economic tendencies. Either the Party will disappear, having served its essential purpose, or it will survive—like the Mexican Revolutionary Party—as the specific political expression of a new, native ruling class and an emerging Indian bureaucracy. There is all the more reason therefore why the more advanced elements in the nationalist movement must preserve their independence and freedom of action and must strengthen their own position *now* and why they must make every effort to achieve an alliance with the awakening Indian peasantry.

The significance of the Indian Revolution, coming in this period of world-wide revolutionary change, is world-wide. Imperialism everywhere cannot long survive the success of the Indian revolt against imperialism which has already lighted the fires of resistance to colonial exploitation throughout Asia and Africa. And international capitalism which depends for so much of its strength and profit upon the plunder of colonial and semi-colonial peoples is rendered immeasurably weaker and more vulnerable to the demands and pressures of its masses at home once its imperial power has been destroyed. The Indian Revolution then is a phase, a step in the world-wide democratic revolution which alone is capable of blocking the onward march of fascism, regardless of the outcome of the present war. Its most direct beneficiaries outside of India will be the British working class. It is bringing new allies to the fight for both freedom and plenty in every nation of the world.

The masses of the East are on the march. The masses of the West must join with them and support them.

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